DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 251 869 CS 504 778

AUTHOR McCroskey, James C.; Payne, Steven K.
TITLE The Impact of Communication Apprehension on Student Retention and Success: A Preliminary Report.
PUB DATE Nov 84
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (70th, Chicago, IL, November 1-4. 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *College Freshmen; *Communication Apprehension; *Communication Research; Comparative Analysis; *Dropout Characteristics; Higher Education; Longitudinal Studies; Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

In the first two years (1982-84) of a projected 5-year longitudinal study of communication apprehension and academic achievement, data were collected for 1,884 incoming college freshmen at West Virginia University. The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension was administered to the subjects during freshmen orientation. For each semester during the two years, the official grade point averages and retention/drop-out behavior of the students were analyzed. It was hypothesized that students with high communication apprehension would have lower grade point averages than those with lower apprehension, and that the drop-out rate among students with high communication apprehension would be higher than that among students with lower apprehension. The results of the analyses supported both hypotheses. High apprehensives were approximately 29% more likely to leave school before the end of their first semester and 37% more likely to leave in the first two years than were those with low apprehension. High communication apprehensives achieved lower grade-point averages and earned slightly fewer credits than did those with low apprehension, for each of the semesters studied. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED251869

The Impact of Communication Apprehension on Student Retention and Success: A Preliminary Report

James C. McCroskey and Steven K. Payne
West Virginia University

Abstract

Results of the first two years of a five-year longitudinal study relating to communication apprehension, student achievement, and student retention at the college level are reported. The preliminary results indicate that high communication apprehensives are significantly more likely to drop out of college than are lows and they are also less likely to achieve high grade point averages.

Paper presented at the annual convention of the Speech Communication Association, Chicago, IL, November, 1984.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J. C. McCroskey
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 504 778

The Impact of Communication Apprehension on Student Retention and Success: A Preliminary Report

In recent years, the decline of student enrollment has become a major concern for most college and university administrators. Understandably, much of the decline may be attributable to the concomitant decline of college-aged persons available to fill the institutions of higher learning in the United States. Consequently, it is imperative that these administrators develop a better understanding of those variables that would facilitate the retention and success of the declining numbers of incoming students who are being recruited by their institutions.

In the instructional communication literature, scholars have endeavored to assess the impact of individuals' communication orientations upon their behavior in the educational environment. One such orientation that has been the subject of more than 800 articles, books, and book chapters over the last fifteen years (Payne & Richmond, 1984) is communication apprehension and avoidance. Communication apprehension refers to "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons," (McCroskey, 1982b, 1984a). Richmond (1984), in her review of the communication apprehension literature in the educational context, has suggested that such fears or anxieties impact students' course choices, seating preferences, classroom participation, and selection of majors.

Although much speculation has arisen with regard to the impact that communication apprehension (CA) may have upon a student's retention and success in his/her academic pursuits, there has been no direct longitudinal analysis investigating such questions and hypotheses. However, cross-sectional analysis would appear to lend support to the contention that CA does predict academic achievement and success. McCroskey & Andersen (1976), for example, found that low communication apprehensive college students had significantly higher grade-point-averages at graduation than did high apprehensives. Further, Scott and Wheeless (1977) reported that low apprehensives attained higher achievement scores in normal sized classroom settings than did low apprehensives.

Although CA has not been directly related to drop-out rates, it is reasonable to suggest that success or failure in school should impact the decisions of students to leave or remain in college. Since CA has been related in cross-sectional research to students' grade-point-average, it is reasonable to assume that CA and retention are also related. Moreover, loneliness (Zakahi & Duran, 1982) and lack of friendships (McCroskey & Sheahan, 1978) have been shown to be partially a function of CA. Theoretically, the high apprehensive may feel compelled to withdraw from situations that continually magnify his/her psychological experience of loneliness. The social climate facilitated by the college or university campus may in fact be a constant reminder to the high apprehensive that he/she has few, if any, close friendships. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that CA may have a dual impact on student retention: first, student achievement as determined by grade-point-average is in part a function of CA; and second, CA enhances tendencies toward loneliness and lack of friendsips which,

consequently, increase tendencies to withdraw and avoid situations that would magnify the psychological discomfort.

In light of the preceding discussion, the present study was conducted in order to investigate two hypothesized effects of CA upon students' retention and success in college. Specifically:

H1: Students with high communication apprehension will attain lower grade-point-averages than students with low communication apprehension.

H2: The drop-out rate among students with high communication apprehension will be larger than that among students with low communication apprehension.

Method

The following anaysis involves an investigation that spans the course of four academic semesters at West Virginia University. Just prior to the beginning of the Fall semester of 1982, the researchers collected data from incoming students during the week of freshman orientation. For each semester during the two years that followed, the official grade-point-averages and retention/drop-out behavior of the students were made available to the investigators by the University Office of Admissions and Records. In order to more accurately study the impact of communication apprehension (CA) upon success and retention, a longitudinal approach was undertaken. The analyses reported here represent the first two years of one class of freshman. The complete project will involve two freshman classes over a four-year period.

Subjects

The subjects for this study were 1884 incoming college freshman at West Virginia University at the beginning of the Fall semester of 1982. This sample represented the portion of the freshman class that attended the orientation session prior to the start of classes. A highly representative sample was obtained, 56% were male and 44% were female. These percentages were precisely those reported for the entire freshman group by the West Virginia University Office of Admissions and Records.

Instrumentation and Procedure

The 24-item version of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24; McCroskey, 1982a) was utilized to assess subjects' levels of communication apprehension. This instrument was administered to all 1884 subjects during the orientation session. Reliabilities for the PRCA-24 have consistently exceeded .90 (McCroskey, 1984b). For the present study, the split-half (odd-even) reliability estimate was .94 ($X = 65.6$; $sd = 15.69$).

Students' academic success for each of the four semesters was represented as their cumulative grade-point-averages (g.p.a.) on the commonly accepted 4-point scaling system. The g.p.a.'s were obtained from the official records of the Office of Admissions and Records.

Retention rate for each of the four semesters was represented as the number of subjects in the sample officially enrolled and completing each semester. Retained subjects for the four time frames are reported in Table 1.

Data Analysis

The independent variable for this investigation was the subject's level of CA. CA levels were computed using the mean and standard deviation of the PRCA-24 from a prior sample of over 20,000 subjects. Those subjects scoring below 52 were classified as low apprehensive while those scoring above 79 were classified as high apprehensive. Subjects with scores between 51 and 79 were considered moderately apprehensive.

Two-way analysis of variance procedures were computed for each of the four time frames representing each semester. These procedures used 3 levels of CA as the classification variable with g.p.a. and credits earned as the dependent variables. Further AOV procedures were computed to test the interaction effects of CA and sex on g.p.a. for each of the four time frames.

Results

Table 1 reports the retention/drop-out rate by CA level for each of the four semesters (both totals and percentages reported). The overall cumulative drop-out rate for the entire sample across the two-year period was 29.5%. The West Virginia University Office of Institutional Research reported a drop-out rate of 29.4% for the entire 1982 freshman population during the same time period. This finding suggests that the orientation sample was highly representative.

During their first semester of registration, only 6.2 percent of this student sample dropped out of school. Among high communication apprehensives the percentage was 7.6, while among low apprehensives the percentage was 5.4. Using the low apprehensives as a baseline referent, high apprehensives were approximately 29 percent more likely to leave school before the end of their first semester. While this appears to be a substantial difference, it is not statistically significant (Chi-square = 1.76, $p>.05$).

By the end of their second year, as noted above, 29.5 percent of the sample dropped out of school. Among high communication apprehensives the percentage was 32.7, among lows 23.9. This difference is statistically significant (Chi-square = 6.99, $p<.05$). Again using the low apprehensive drop-out rate as the baseline, high communication apprehensives were approximately 37 percent more likely to drop out of school in their first two years.

Results of the AOV procedures showed a significant main effect for sex on GPA for all time frames: Fall 1982 ($F = 15.89$, $p<.0001$, males = 2.66, females = 2.43); Spring 1983 ($F = 21.92$, $p<.0001$, males = 2.72, females = 2.55); Fall 1983 ($F = 27.59$, $p<.001$, males = 2.82, females = 2.64); Spring 1984 ($F = 19.59$, $p<.0001$, males = 2.83, females = 2.69). However, the interaction effect for CA level and sex was not significant for any time frame.

Results of the AOV procedures testing differences in GPA and credits earned by CA level are reported in Table 2. Means for all 3 levels of CA during the Fall 1982 time frame were significantly different for both GPA and credits earned. For the Spring 1983 period, GPA was significantly different between high and low apprehensives and between moderate and low apprehensives while all 3 levels differed from one another on credits earned. For Fall 1983, the pattern of significant differences among the 3 CA levels for both GPA and credits earned was the same: high and low apprehensives were different and moderate and low apprehensives were different. In the Spring 1984 time frame, GPA differs only between high and low apprehensives while credits earned for high apprehensives differ both from moderate and low apprehensives.

A supplementary anaysis was conducted in which all subjects classified as either high or low apprehensies who dropped out of school during the two-year period were omitted. Analysis of the GPAs of these groups indicated some striking results. For each of the four semesters the GPAs of the two groups differed significantly, and the GPAs did not change over the four semesters. The low CAs had a GPA or 2.9 every semester and the high CAs had a GPA of 2.7 every semester. This suggests that the apparent improvement in GPA among students of all CA levels which is seen in Table 2 is purely an artifact of drop-outs. Thus, for every student whose GPA increased during their first two years, there was a student whose GPA declined. Cross-sectional data reported by Universities consistently show higher for student bodies from freshman through senior years. If our data are representative, such data may simply indicate that better students are more likely to stay in school, not that students achieve more in the later years of their college education.

Conclusions

The present report is based on only the first two years of one sample of college students in a longitudinal study of two college samples which will not be completed until 1987. Consequently, any conclusions must be considered to be very tentative. With that caution in mind, let us consider what appears to be happening in this investigation.

To begin, it is clear that the drop-out pattern for high communication apprehensives is more severe than that for low communication apprehensives. Secondly, it is clear that high communication apprehensives achieve lower GPAs than do lows, from the first semester on. Moderate apprehensives fall in between highs and lows in terms of both retention and achievement.

The implications of these results for those of us concerned with the problems of communication apprehension and/or student retention are far from clear at this point. Students arrive at a college with a fairly stable level of communication apprehension. In addition they arrive with a solid background of experience with classroom instruction. While these results indicate high apprehensives are more likely to drop out of school during their first four semesters than other students, whether the apprehension is the direct causal factor or is mediated by reduced academic ability, as a result of the high apprehensives previous contact with education, is not known.

Sorting this issue out is crucial to determining proper approaches to remediation. If apprehension of college students is the direct causal agent, treatment of the apprehension in the early weeks of college should be expected to assist the student to remain in school and reduce the problem of retention among this group. If, on the other hand, apprehension is only the indirect cause—if the damage to the student's academic achievement potential was done at an earlier schooling level--treatment at the college level should not be expected to be successful. The high apprehensives may already be lower achievers by the time they reach college and will continue to be in spite of treatment at that time. Treatment at an earlier time would be called for. It is our hope that we will be able to clarify this issue before the conclusion of this project.

References

McCroskey, J. C. (1982a). Introduction to rhetorical communication. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

McCroskey, J. C. (1982b). Oral communication apprehension: A reconceptualization. In M. Burgoon (Ed.), Communication Yearbook 6 (pp. 136-170). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

McCroskey, J. C. (1984a). The communication apprehension perspective. In J. A. Daly & J. C. McCroskey (Eds.), Avoiding Communication: Shyness, Reticence, and Communication Apprehension (pp. 13-38). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

McCroskey, J. C. (1984b). Self-report measurement. In J. A. Daly & J. C. McCroskey (Eds.), Avoiding Communication: Shyness, Reticence, and Communication Apprehension (pp. 81-94). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

McCroskey, J. C., & Andersen, J. F. (1976). The relationship between communication apprehension and academic achievement among college students. Human Communication Research, 3, 73-81.

McCroskey, J. C., & Sheahan, M. E. (1978). Communication apprehension and social behavior in a college environment. Communication Quarterly, 26, 41-50.

Payne, S. K., & Richmond, V. P. (1984). A bibliography of related research and theory. In J. A. Daly & J. C. McCroskey (Eds.), Avoiding Communication: Shyness, Reticence, and Communication Apprehension (pp. 247-294). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Richmond, V. P. (1984). Implications of quietness: Some facts and speculations. In J. A. Daly & J. C. McCroskey (Eds.), Avoiding Communication: Shyness, Reticence, and Communication Apprehension (pp. 145-155). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Scott, M. D., & Wheeless, L. R. (1977). The relationship of three types of communication apprehension to classroom achievement. Southern Speech Communication Journal, 3, 246-255.

Zakahi, W. R., & Duran, R. L. (1982). All the lonely people: The relationship among loneliness, communicative competence, and communication anxiety. Communication Quarterly, 30, 203-209.

Table 1

Retention/Drop-out Rate

by CA Level

Time Frame	CA Level						
	High		Moderate		Low		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Orientation	352		1197		335		1884
Fall, 1982							
Drop	27	7.6	71	5.9	18	5.4	116
Retained	325	92.4	1126	94.1	317	94.6	1768
Cum. Drop	27	7.6	71	5.9	18	5.4	116
Spring, 1983							
Drop	17	5.2	57	5.1	14	4.4	88
Retained	308	94.8	1069	94.9	303	95.6	1680
Cum. Drop	44	12.5	128	10.7	32	9.5	204
Fall, 1983							
Drop	59	19.2	166	15.5	36	12.0	261
Retained	249	80.4	903	84.5	267	88.0	1419
Cum. Drop	103	29.3	294	24.6	68	20.3	465
Spring, 1984							
Drop	12	3.4	66	5.5	12	3.6	90
Retained	237	96.6	837	94.5	255	96.4	1329
Cum. Drop	115	32.7	360	30.1	80	23.9	555

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table 2

Grade-Point-Averages and Credits Earned

by CA Level

Time Frame	CA Level		
	High	Moderate	Low
Fall, 1982			
G.P.A.	2.46a	2.55a	2.67a
Credits Earned	13.20a	13.70a	14.10a
Spring, 1983			
G.P.A.	2.58a	2.64b	2.76ab
Credits Earned	27.10a	27.80a	28.70a
Fall, 1983			
G.P.A.	2.72a	2.73b	2.81ab
Credits Earned	42.90a	43.30b	44.30ab
Spring, 1984			
G.P.A.	2.74a	2.79	2.84a
Credits Earned	56.70ab	58.30b	58.90a

a - b: Means with the same subscript in the same row are significantly different at $p<.05$.